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Labor Conditions as Viewed by a Manufacturer

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THE world war has upset much of the previous existing well-oiled economic machinery, and it has been creaking and groaning and jolting along ever since, at times coming dangerously near to breaking down altogether. The most delicate part of the complex economic machine, that of the human relation in industry, having become disrupted, is receiving the attention of many thinkers, some of whom, not having had practical experience, advance theories which look very well on superficial view, but when put to the test of actual experience are found to be not, at present, workable in practice.

It was Aristotle who said it is safe to follow no theory that is not buttressed by practice. While theoretical discussion has great value, industrial relations, questions pertaining to capital and labor, particularly to the attitude of workingmen, can best be solved, it seems to me, by those who have united practice with science in forming conclusions.

Collective bargaining is one of the theories which sound well, but in practice it means that men who know nothing of your business, have no intimate personal touch with your workmen, come in and dictate as to the management of that business; in practice it makes it impossible for the management to employ good and efficient workmen who are needed unless those workmen are members of or join the particular union controlling that shop; in practice it means that the Fosters and Fitzpatricks, men in whose judgment and good intentions

no intelligent person can for a moment have faith, seek to put what amounts to a throttle upon industry, for the ostensible benefit of the working men, but in reality, in the majority of cases, for their own ulterior and destructive ends. Judge Gary performed a very real service for America in taking a firm stand against the aggression of bolshevistic, anarchistic and I. W. W. outsiders.

ADVANTAGES AND DANGER OF UNIONS

Again, we might also pertinently inquire how a bargain can be made when the one side has neither legal nor moral responsibility, wants none, and only too often repudiates contracts when made. I have no quarrel with the unions. The right to organize for mutual protection and benefit is not questioned; neither is there any question but that through the instrumentality of unionism the workers have secured for themselves desirable and beneficial reforms which otherwise might not have come, or come only after long delay, having been grudgingly conceded under the pressure of public opinion by autocratic and unprogressive employers. Unionism's danger, however, is that of becoming autocratic itself. One of its principal objects appears to be, in all too many cases, that of getting a strangle hold upon an industry in which there is a chance of becoming strongly entrenched, and then putting on the screws. This is evidenced in the desperate effort the unions are making for the closed shop, the result of which is that the employer is tied hand and

foot, has no say as to whom he shall employ or whom discharge—can employ no man, no matter how desirable an addition he may be to the force, or how much needed, unless that man is stamped with the hallmark of the particular union under whose domination and by the grace of whose favor he operates his plant.

On the part of the independent workman to whom unions are distasteful and who prefers to retain his liberty of action, the closed shop operates to shut the door of opportunity in his face, deprives him of his primary and inalienable right to pursue his lawful vocation without interference—a right guaranteed him under the common law.

Take the printing trade as an instance. It is said there are but four newspapers of consequence in the country which are not under control of the typographical union. The editor of one of these independent newspapers recently told on a public platform some startling facts with regard to the tyranny exercised by the typographical union in the plants controlled by them. Shaking his finger at the reporters who were sitting before him, he said, "Newspapers love the sensational. What I say is sufficiently sensational, is it not? But it will not appear in your journals. Your editors will not be permitted to publish it." The absence of any reference to it in their newspapers proved that he was right.

The unions must eventually see that they are on the wrong track, and under the guidance of more enlightened leadership I believe they will eventually become of real benefit to their membership and an important and beneficial part of the social organization. If the domination of extremists is encouraged or permitted, as now in many labor organizations,

they invite disaster, not only to themselves but also to the industrial fabric generally. No happiness or contentment to their followers can grow out of the seeds of envy and hatred which they are industriously striving to instil.

Our working classes here are not only better off than anywhere else in the world, but better off here now than ever before in the history of the world. Notwithstanding the wild career of extravagance throughout the land, which has been termed an industrial dance of death, the deposits of workingmen in savings banks show a large increase. It is estimated that we are losing over a thousand million dollars a year, directly and indirectly, from strikes. A strike is war, it is a wasteful way of settling difficulties, and I would say of a strike what Franklin said of war, there is no such thing as a good strike or a bad compromise. The wage earners are the greatest sufferers by a strike. The manufacturer has a chance to recoup his losses, in part at least, by accumulating orders and making preparations for a resumption of work, but what is lost to the worker is lost forever, and since every stoppage of production tends to increase the cost of living, it entails a double loss by increasing the price of things he buys. Strikes are especially to be deplored now in view of the enormous waste of the war, which can only be made up by economy and increased production.

THE WAGE EARNER'S OPPORTUNITY

It has been stated by contributors to this volume that the door of opportunity is shut in the face of the wage earner. There could not be a greater error. His opportunities were never so good in the history of the world as now here in this country. If he is only willing to pay the price of success, which

involves economizing and doing his best, he will find more avenues open than were open to Garfield, Lincoln and many others who achieved world renown. Certainly no one could start life with less apparent chances for success than had Lincoln. He was an exception, you will say. Yes, and there is no use blinking the fact that there are many whose limitations are such as to preclude their ever rising above a humble station. This is no discredit to them, and they are entitled to just and fair treatment always, but under no social arrangement that I can think of as holding out any chance of permanence can it be expected that they should receive the same reward that comes to those of greater native ability who make full use of their talents. The idea seems to be held by many outside of Russia, as well as within that unhappy and distracted country, that somehow the so-called proletariat can be legislated into opulence and ease. Nevertheless, Emerson's dictum remains forever true, that "society is a troop of thinkers, and the best heads take the best places." How could it be otherwise, except under the dictatorship of brutal strength, which eventually must give way to the power of intelligence, as history has so often proved? The long list of names of men in this country, who have risen from humble beginnings to places of prominence and power, is a complete refutation of any such notion as that to which I have referred.

Before engaging in business I worked on my father's farm. I have been a manufacturer for 64 years, and have always been as much or more interested in economics and the theory of business than in business itself. This has afforded me a chance to unite practice with science.

RELATIONS BETWEEN LABOR AND CAPITAL

I am persuaded that it is as idle for capital and labor to fight as for the hands to fight the head. Both are absolutely essential, are interdependent, and I believe the working classes as well as the employing class will eventually come to understand this. A great deal depends upon management and personal contact. I could mention a number of examples. One of our foundry employees, a number of years ago when we were working on a large export order taken at a narrow margin, complained that he and some of his companions were not receiving sufficient pay in proportion to the rest. I knew they were getting all we could afford to pay, but referred him to the department heads with instructions to them to investigate the matter thoroughly and impartially and give him the result, after which I told him to come to see me, and if we could afford to pay more we would do it. As he failed to appear, I sent for him. When he came, he said: "I am a good sport. I find you are paying all you can afford to pay, and am afraid if you changed our pay for that job you would have to reduce it." The investigation had proved that we could not afford an advance.

On another occasion, fifteen or twenty years ago when I had practically retired from active management, a large export order which was wanted in a hurry was dragging along, and the superintendent told me it was utterly impossible to get it out in time. I knew the men, and told the superintendent to go off on a vacation, that I would take care of the shop. He went off, and I took charge, going out in the factory and working with the men. They were spurred to renewed effort, largely increased their output, took the greatest interest in

the game of beating time, and enjoyed it as much as I did myself. Needless to say the job was gotten out in the time promised.

There is a great deal in keeping in close contact with the workmen, treating them as fellow workers. They should understand that they are working *with* the employer, not *for* him; that the employer's business is to provide them with work so that he can keep them continuously employed and pay their wages. If they are given a square deal, there will be no difficulty between employer and employed if not interfered with by outsiders.

I am fain to believe that the eventual result of the present unrest and discontent will be a better relation between capital and labor, employer and employed, than has ever been enjoyed before. It has set men to thinking and planning. There are many promising signs, and I believe the true prophet must be an optimist. The shop committee system, I am convinced, is the true plan. It has been established in our plant. Meetings of foremen and managers are held weekly, as well as weekly meetings of an executive committee chosen by the men from amongst their fellows, which meets in connection with the management for the discussion of improvements or complaints and the well-being of employees generally. The system has so far worked admirably. Even with the greatest care and fair dealing, however, a strike is always possible from outside interference.

RELATIONS BETWEEN EMPLOYER AND EMPLOYEE

In the relations between employer and employed, that grand old rule, "Do unto others as you would have them do to you" will solve most problems. We need to imbibe the spirit of Americanism as exemplified in the life of that great man, Abraham Lincoln, whom I knew personally. I listened to both his inaugurals, heard his Gettysburg address. He was a superman—one of those men who accomplish a great work, lead the world, take possession of the hearts of mankind—no one seems to know exactly how or why. It would be profitable for us all, and especially for the workers, to study his life and writings. He told me once, "Young man, make it the object of your life to go to bed at night feeling that you have done some good during the day, contributed your mite to helping someone." My reply was, "Mr. President, if I could spell that *m i g h t* it would be an inspiration," to which he rejoined, "What's the difference? Isn't might made up of mites?"

Now the employer has a boundless opportunity to practice this doctrine. Let him get close to his employees, let them understand that he wishes to treat them fairly by endeavoring in all cases to be just and fair in his dealings with them, and I think sooner or later the labor question will be solved. I believe we are now on the road towards solving it.